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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
9 May 1969

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Liberation Front's New Peace Proposal

1. The Vietnamese Communists have proposed a new approach to a settlement of the Vietnam war. Their goal remains, as before, the unilateral withdrawal of US forces and the replacement of the present government of South Vietnam with a coalition government which the Communists will have a hand in forming and be able to control. The latest Communist proposal, however, is packaged in what Hanoi hopes is a much more attractive wrapping that conspicuously avoids attacks on the US and the South Vietnamese Government. The new proposal was probably stimulated by the Communists' desire to regain the propaganda initiative from Thieu and to maximize the opportunities for creating confusion and disarray among non-Communist political elements in Saigon. Nevertheless, the public dialogue which has taken place between Thieu and the Communists has now served to move them both somewhat in each other's direction. Both sides have now set forth the terms under which they would agree to discussions on a political settlement.

2. In essence, the National Liberation Front ten-point proposal of 8 May, called "the Main Principles and Contents of the Total Solution," seeks to eliminate the US from discussions on all issues except that of the withdrawal of US and other free world forces, which still must be complete and unconditional. The status of North Vietnamese troops would be taken up by the Vietnamese delegations.

Note: This memorandum was prepared largely by CIA, with contributions from the Department of State, which concurs in it.

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6. A number of omissions appear to be intended to suggest a softer line toward the South Vietnamese Government and its constitutional structure. Thus, the Front statement makes no demands for the overthrow of the "lackey puppet administration," in conspicuous contrast to the emphasis placed on this demand in the 1967 Front program. By this omission the Front appears to be suggesting that the South Vietnamese Government can be included among the "political forces" that are to negotiate the establishment of a provisional coalition government. This impression is reinforced by the prohibition of discrimination against those who have "cooperated with one side or the other" and the absence of references to "repentance" in one form or another as a precondition to equal treatment, although the Front does insist on adherence to "peace, independence, and neutrality". This wording is sufficiently vague that it does not necessarily exclude the South Vietnamese Government; it would certainly allow such political forces as the Alliance, the militant Buddhists and virtually every other disparate Vietnamese politician to participate. Point five may also have been intended to suggest that the negotiations for a provisional government could take place while US forces are still in country, although a cease-fire would be in effect. This would also be a first for the Communists.

7. The Front statement deals in familiar terms with the normalization of North-South relations and reunification. (Point Seven) It reiterates that the demarcation line as established in the 1954 Geneva Agreements is "provisional" and "not a political or territorial frontier." Pending reunification, "the two zones will agree upon the status of the Demilitarized Zone and set forth the regulations for crossing the provisional demarcation line of the Demilitarized Zone." This statement appears to require bilateral control of the Demilitarized Zone and, by implication, to exclude the Zone question as something to be negotiated multilaterally as part of the peace settlement.

8. Another new and hard element tossed into the Front proposal is point nine, which calls for negotiations on the release of prisoners of war but which couples this with a virtual demand for the reparations from the US to both North and South Vietnam for war damage.